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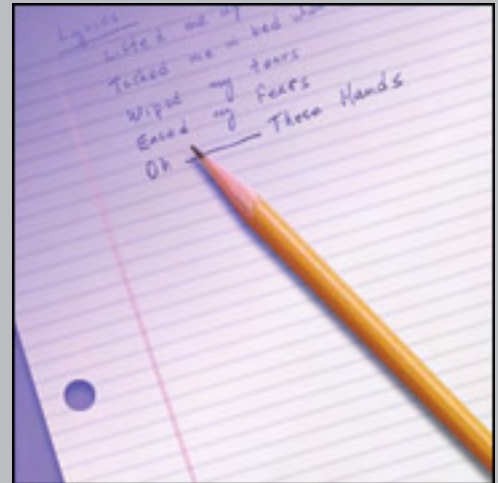
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Lyric Writing

Lesson 1:
Brainstorming: Object Writing

This lesson is excerpted from an online course. While the navigation links on each page are not active, all of the multimedia interactions are. Have fun!

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For these first few weeks of this course, we will concentrate on a writing exercise called **Object Writing**. It is the basic tool for developing your writer's voice, your writer's eyes, tapping your writer's storehouse of experiences and memories--everything that makes you different from every other writer, and everything that makes your writer interesting.

You will be Object Writing every day for the first few weeks, then you can taper off--though plan to do some Object Writing every week throughout the course. That's how important it is.

Object Writing is writing from your senses. Its whole purpose is to connect your writing to what you see, touch, taste, smell, and hear; to the way your body responds--increased breathing, heartrate, pulse, muscle tension; and, finally, to your sense of movement. Making this connection is an important goal for any writer, but especially for a lyricist, since you have a lot to do in not much space. Check this out:

All the things that lovers keep
From love affairs of long ago...

This is generic and bland. It doesn't pull you in like

Valentines and Maple leaves
Tucked inside a paperback --Joni Mitchell

The more specific the picture, the more emotion it creates. "Universal" doesn't mean "generic" or "abstract," it means "specific:" something that appeals to the senses. When you use language that stimulates the senses, it er, stimulates the senses. When your listeners' senses are stimulated, their emotions kick in. They provide your song with their pictures and experiences: their first valentines. Your song becomes their song.

If you do not stimulate their senses, as in

All the things that lovers keep
From love affairs of long ago...

often your listeners end up thinking about what they'll have for lunch instead of listening to what you have to say.

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Your valentines and Maple leaves are resting in your sense memories--the way they feel, smell, look; how your skin tingled and your heart jumped when you got that valentine; kicking through piles of golden leaves in the cool autumn air, excited, holding hands--all there tucked and waiting for you to retrieve them. Object Writing trains you to get 'em when you need 'em.

Object Writing is a morning exercise (yep, morning--wake up your writer and keep him/her with you all day). If you let your writer sleep all day, it will. Object Writing in the morning is a good elbow in your writer's side. Once awake, he/she will tap into your sense memories and provide you with images and metaphors that make you see things in a different way, communicate your ideas more powerfully.

Object Writing is timed. Buy a timer. You MUST stop at exactly the allotted time (usually 10 minutes, but you will also work with 5 minutes and even with 90 seconds). A time limit keeps you sharp; it is an exercise with boundaries: you get used to working in a tight space. It makes you get there fast. And face it, if you wrote a piece of Object Writing for 25 minutes one morning, your writer would probably want to take the next morning off. Manageable tasks. Doable agreements with yourself.

Before you start, it helps to write your senses across the top of the page:

sight sound taste touch smell body motion

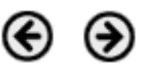
Actually writing them down every time allow you a little time (take a few seconds each) to acknowledge each one. Then, as you write, there will be times you need to decide where to go next; a glance at the top of the page will prove stimulating.

Start by setting your timer for 10 minutes. Then pick an object, any object, it doesn't matter much: teacup, lamp, greyhound. Or pick something from your senses: the smell of fresh mown grass, the taste of raspberries. Write using only sense-bound language. That's the only rule. No rhyme, or rhythmic composition. Incomplete sentences. Go wherever your senses lead you--don't stay focused on the object. You will find some really interesting places. Keep going until the timer goes off. Then stop. Immediately.

Let's take a look at a few samples.

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Object Writing Samples

Object: Sky
Time limit: 5 minutes
From: Cathy

Sapphires glisten underneath the glassine globe--marquis shaped clouds floating, cross her eyes, back buried in the uncut summer grass --two yellow wings flash as she blinks, antennae curve and flutter like lashes upon her cheek. Roses billowing softly--pink lips pursing against cool violet petals--slender green stems bowing in her white hands like a hymnal, pages gilded--reflecting light like the crystal eyes of the lake--cattails sing, dragonflies passing between narrow rods of brown and white--fire--lazy slags of mud cup puddles of warm brine--salt drying white crusts at the slick edges--nighttime--worms guzzling their shade in the twiney albino roots--parasol dandelions ascend, scaling the blue heavens carrying child wishes...

Object: Sky
Time limit: 5 minutes
From: Pat

On my back, grasses windshadow and bow in rhythm, tickling my face as I watch two Redtails wheeling their figure 8's, riding, slicing the air--fore-wing feathers flattened against muscles and bone--peeling left toward a stand of sentinel pines brooding in shadow. Sun blanches my face, warm in spackles, rinsing clouds and lacing arrows of light against queens lace and ragweed, ants scale weeds flattening in the wind...

Object: Nail Polish
Time limit: 10 minutes
From: Cathy

Plastic soldiers lined up upon a narrow strip of glass--robin egg blue--drops of plastic pad a pattern--wash basin ringletted in copper stains--black and grayed rubber plug--leashed to its silver bubble length of chain--even rolls of empty square holes rest at the floor--hot air pumping in yellowed shower curtain still hanging on 2 thin silver hooks--a vacant rubber stool sits in the porcelain tub wedged tightly against the white shoulders like a sleeping body poised for 10am mourning--patent leather high heels twist into the bare wood aisle--padded toe pointed heavenward. Roses wreath mahogany like the horseshoe ornament Chesterfield in Kentucky Derby winner's circle--dark suit coats buttoned properly--neckties bow under the smooth shaved chins-- summercut grass splashes its odor into the mist laden air--warm bodies dripping under fine leather Stetsons--jeans pressed--straight lines riding down the plump owner's thighs--lapel spitting baby's breath and cash--green curls figures dribbling out the corners of his greasy lips--teeth trapping peppercorns from the brisket BBQ.

Object: Nail Polish
Time limit: 10 minutes
From: Pat

Lungs recoil and try to duck the invader, rinsing pink flesh with benzedrine molecules, mouths whispering we will soak you sink deep and harden you to shiny porcelain, lung shaped plates set before the sagging couple, sagebrush of chin hairs snaking from her jowls, wire thick catfish whiskers to rub his neck as they whitebelly into the sagging mattress, trailer shuddering with the rhythm of sweat, a confusion of French fries littering the counter, pointing the way to paradise. Flo and Arnie, stubby fingers banded by promises embedded deep in Crisco dreams, deep red nail polish curling under as she gasps and thrusts once more and whites her eyes to the ceiling. "Arnie you're the best!" and he rolls off, jello quivering against iron frames in the rear of the doublewide.

Object: Elevator
Time limit: 10 minutes
From: Cathy

Breath sucks back into my throat--stomach ball jellies to my toes like an anchor hoisted over ship--dull brass dragging thick fingers of midnight currents chain unspools--like roller skates gliding freely--wind sassing back against stubborn waves, black fallen angels bow and thrash in the darkness--thunder twists between sweaty muscled clouds--silver daggers spear the sky horizon, lashing down at the warm sleeping distant halls--sandy upper lip catching foam of a rootbeer float --eyes widen--thirst deepens a throat of parched earth guzzles a torpedo stream of charcoal water--stars mirror in the salty crystals--reeds bristle against oncoming Northern winds--smooth moonlit feathers hug against one bony leg of support--a white beam sweeps the coastal blanket--lighthouse calling like a lone love--darkness capes around her tall slender body--urchins clinging, bottle bristles against her feet--sunrise begins to touch her--threads of melon flesh across cradled lids--shades of light lift the dreamy nightmare up--rolling it back into heaven's closet--soft crystal knob pulls shut...

Object: Elevator
Time limit: 10 minutes
From: Pat

Breeze flutters her forelock as she bows, tears furrowing her face, dust streaking in trenches as one overflows her lower eyelid, then another. The box poises above the earth's mouth, resting on pulleys that have lowered lowered so many into the stomach to be jellied by bacteria and punctured by pale grubs invading from all angles, generations feeding like living in a small town, dusty rockers by the feed store chatting slow of corn and soybeans, pellet fertilizers and subsidies. Hot winds stains cotton shirts with yellow sweat, working a trail in slow splotches, straw hat swatting horseflies on snake skin boots, round glasses squinting into the afternoon. Breath of laurel and elm intertwined in Rockville Cemetery over the Emmett plot, Margaret finally laid to rest with her beloved Charles Robert, 30 years waiting as a love relinquished to memory, circling the old wedding ring by habit over arthritic knuckles, questioning again under her breath, smiling as his deep bass responds, touching her shoulder.

Object: Lily Pad
Time limit: 90 seconds
From: Cathy

Backs of hands grown over with emerald moss--rocking chair webbed with rickety spider legs--ponytail--wire gray hair like a witch's broom--Cutlery limps across her throat--bones like bridges suspending wrinkled skin--red pools under the Wood-Spoke Linoleum

Object: Lily Pad
Time limit: 90 seconds
From: Pat

Dancing in childhood sunlight, swamp grass and green algae V-ing above the largemouth's wake, widening to shores, a mouth taking in the stars, galaxies in the eyes of a child.

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Due by July 07, 2003

Welcome to your first series of online Object Writing exercises! Each day this week, you will have a series of exercises to complete. Scroll down a bit and look at your writing area. Notice the Start button, a time, and four tabs along the bottom. Each of these tabs represents a separate exercise.

When you are ready to begin the first exercise, click the Start button. As soon as you hit Start, you will be presented with the object for the exercise, and the time will begin counting down. Staying close to your senses, respond to the object for the time indicated. If you would like to clear the screen at any time, click the Reset button.

Once the time is up, you will no longer be able to type. Everything you have written will remain on the page, even if you decide to visit another site and return later.

When you have finished the first exercise, click the next tab to advance to the next exercise. Continue this process until have you completed all four exercises.

When you are done, share your writing for **each** exercise with the class. To do this, simply highlight the text you wrote and copy it (Command + C on a Mac, or CTRL + C on a PC). Click the Discussion Thread link below, click Reply, and paste your writing in the body of a message box (Command + V on a Mac, or CTRL + V on a PC). Click the Preview button and then, on the next page, the Post message now button. Again, do this for **each** exercise.

Have fun! Note, too, that there'll be a lyric due by Friday at 6:00 p.m., so be alert to possibilities as you go through the week.



Advancing to the next tab before you complete an exercise will stop the timer. Make sure to type for the full length of the exercise before continuing!

If you complete the exercises and want to redo them at a later time, click the Reset button to clear what you've written and refresh the timer.

 Assignments and Replies

- [Post your assignment](#)
- [Watch this activity](#)

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